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ABSTRACT

Systems technology has much to offer as a tool which can help counselors in guidance departments to develop their own goals, to establish their own priorities, and to develop monitoring techniques to evaluate their progress toward these ends. The lists of projects under development involving computers, printed materials, and multi-media materials are extensive and extremely exciting. However, the very introduction of sensational sub-systems may well divert attention from the critical problems in guidance departments for longer periods of time. It takes a system to help decide what questions to ask systematically, and until the strands of the guidance operations are woven together in the minds of practicing counselors computer operations can never be more than attachments to already existing resources found in guidance offices. The counselor's role will be enhanced when he asks for help in establishing his department's "system." When he does establish this dynamic framework of priority-placed objectives, he will be in an excellent position to use the information sub-systems developed by others. (Author)

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The situation in guidance offices around the United States today is analogous to that of an undergraduate student who completes a major term paper early in the morning of the day on which it is due. He responds in time with the required assignment, and, with some trepidation, awaits the assignment by someone else of the next date when requirements are due. Now some undergraduate students go on to become scholars, and even when term papers are required of such students in Graduate school and beyond, they, more often than not, develop a time and sequence plan for carrying out the activities required. They generally produce results of which they can be proud. They must have time to revise first statements and paragraphs; to obtain editorial

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assistance from others; to do a good job in final typing and document preparation. Final proof-reading can't be done well when one is "bleary-eyed" and without breakfast. In short, the successful scholar, businessman, or educator generally learns to develop a systematic plan for carrying out his research activities.

The truly successful scholar does not equate his personal education with the completion of such requirements, but is able to fit his over-all development into and around the framework in which he must exist. He controls his own development.

I believe that the situation in guidance and counseling now is similar to that of the undergraduate, who responds so completely to the pressures, which the all-knowing professors place on him, that he exerts little effort or influence in establishing control over the development of his own programs.

This is particularly incongruous behavior, because counselors say they are trying to develop this very competence in counselees. I am strongly suggesting that what is known as Systems Technology or Systems Approaches have much to offer as tools which can help counselors in Guidance departments to develop their own goals, to establish their own priorities, and to develop monitoring

techniques to evaluate their progress towards those ends. When counselors sit back and do not take leadership in developing guidance roles and functions for their schools, they are forced by nature of their defensive postures to then react to the existing world.

We are living in an exciting era of rapid change; much of this change brought on by technological innovations. Many new systems (sub-systems) are being developed in the field of guidance and even counseling. Gene Wilson, our chairman today, has spent many hours during the past few years developing a marketable computerized aid to students and counselors in the processes of college selection and career decision making. Joanne Harris has been directing a Project at Willowbrook High School which makes extensive uses of computers with cathode ray display panels. The San Diego County Board of Education in Project VIEW has developed and proliferated the use of microfilm in handling occupational information. New procedures in writing career briefs have been under way in California and New York State by their respective Employment Services. David Tiedeman has been trying to get his computer to talk back to a student the same way the student talks to the machine! The lists of projects under development

involving computers, printed materials, and multi-media materials is extensive and extremely exciting. However, these projects have been under development, in general, by groups with special interests, and it is not reasonable to necessarily expect the concerns which project developers have to be identical to those of a given guidance office or system. Of what value, for instance, is a computer counseling system for an Urban student who does not read well, and who has had a history of failure in every such activity he has attempted?

For years, people have become enthusiastic about new products and materials. This is fitting, but the job which needs to be done in education today will not be accomplished solely through development by outsiders of gadgets, curriculum guides or guidance materials. There is, in fact, a tremendous danger present with the introduction of such information and/or counseling systems into existing schools. When the roles of guidance programs are unclear, it is very easy to assume that any activity which might be called constructive is good. In fact, I am suggesting the opposite; that the very introduction of sensational sub-systems may well divert attention from the critical problems in guidance departments for

longer periods of time. An example, which comes quickly to mind, is that of standardized testing procedures. As machine-scored answer sheets became widely available in centralized testing and scoring operations, and developed at prices which schools could afford, a tremendous burden was lifted from many people, some in guidance, who had carried such responsibilities. In short, it became easier to test more people.

Now in Urban primary schools the elimination of procedures like intelligence testing with their inherent cultural biases, and, more often than not, their inappropriate uses in school systems, has been a tremendous step forward. It should also be noted that the actual testing procedures in Urban primary schools are being cut back, not primarily because of counselor and administrator concerns, nor because the objectives of the testing programs were not being met adequately, but rather because of the pressure from people who were being systematically discriminated against (minority group members and inner-city representatives, etc.). The introduction into your school system of the project VIEW microfilm occupational information file could actually

be damaging if you, as a guidance counselor, began to assume that the job of providing occupational information was being carried out by this comprehensive file. I am afraid that the danger to which I am referring is a pervasive and very insidious one. I'm suggesting that the systems developers may have one point of view, the counselor training institutions another perspective, and that still different pressures may be applied by the actual school settings in which guidance departments function.

The field of guidance counseling is very young, and the introduction of sub-systems is calling to our attention a great many unresolved conflicts. Consider the case of a man in training to be a guidance counselor. If he works in a senior high school, he has a feel for what counselors do on the job. College applications, schedule changes, course planning, meeting with failing students, information-giving activities, preparing honor-roll lists, etc. While in the university training center, he more often than not hears practicum, practicum, practicum. The realms of therapy and affective sensitivity coupled with theoretical approaches often dominate the training content.

All of the computerized guidance systems that I know of justify, in part, their funding by use of the phrase, "...with our system...the counselor can now be "freed" to perform more counseling and other face-to-face human contact activities..." The major thrust of such new systems is typically described in terms of providing occupational information. It is implied that with the new system, the counselor won't have to concern himself with these matters any more. In fact, in far too many schools, little is done anyway.

In school after school, guidance counselors say they value the counselor part of their job title as the most important. While it is not the purpose of this paper to argue the merits of either counseling or guidance, it can be stated that if we continue to neglect guidance planning to honor our therapeutic activities, no substantial progress will occur within the guidance movement which will enable it to respond and thereby develop its rightful place in the school systems of the coming decade.

William Cooley, in an excellent article, called Computer Systems for Guidance, states that, "...it is probable that by the time computers are available for guidance, ...schools will be different enough to present guidance personnel with problems that are qualitatively different from those problems which are their

responsibility today. Guidance functions certainly cannot be considered independent of other aspects of the school."¹

Recent articles in the Phi Delta Kappan stressed the changes which will be occurring in school systems over the coming decade and beyond. The key words were individualization, continuous progress, and so on.

Cooley, in another article, said,

"...there seems to me to be a great opportunity to design a guidance system which is at the heart of an individualized educational system. Many educators would place guidance at the center of the educational process, but most schools have given only token responsibility to guidance services. Although guidance programs have often been assigned the responsibility for helping each student to develop a plan for his educational and vocational future, the technology to implement such a program of individualization planning has not been developed..." "...In an individualized school, the curriculum will be charged with the responsibility of helping the student develop a sense of responsibility and confidence to plan and execute his own educational program. An interesting twist is that although some guidance philosophers have been calling for this for some time, the new kind of school will not only force the issue, but will facilitate accomplishing this goal. Taking the responsibility for learning off the teacher and placing it on the learner on a day-to-day basis will facilitate the emergence of a self-directed student unlike the current dominant school organization. Certainly, as schools individualize their instructional programs, counselors will not be the only ones working with individual students."²

It is not easy for us to develop applications to guidance programs based on the change in emphasis from

teacher-centered to learner-centered educational procedures. For years, many guidance counselors have "represented" the student in his dealings with the institution or establishment. Undoubtedly, changes have occurred as a result of this intervention, however; the changes of the coming decade will be on a much larger scale, and I am concerned with counselors responding actively to plan their own futures. Perhaps it is time for an example:

In the waning months of 1969, an inner-city high school in a city of about 300,000 was offered the following involvement in system resources: a comprehensive, up-to-date microfilm file of all existing printed information on 600 jobs; the corresponding reader-printer equipment in whatever quantity necessary to handle the student demand with no expense for equipment or printout supplies; a computer terminal usable with an existing program in guidance (the terminal also could be utilized for existing math programs and CAI programs in use in other schools); the part-time resources of a staff member from a prominent local industry; two days a week of a guidance consultant's time; the part-time services of a representative of the State Employment Service, and a full-time guidance aide.

The five counselors in the school, who have a student ratio of one counselor to 225 students in grades 8-12, after careful and serious deliberation, decided that they could not afford the time which the introduction of so many "sub-systems" would consume. They felt that the needs expressed by the students whom they were trying to serve were so overwhelming that they could not afford time for these guidance activities. Moreover, while they acknowledged that they did have a responsibility to perform these activities, they said they did not plan to carry out such activities in the coming months. These same counselors knew and have discussed the fact that if they continue to respond only to the pressures which student needs place on them, and as they retreat more and more into the exclusive one-to-one role, that the situation in their guidance office will continue to deteriorate, placing greater and greater burdens on them each day. I must stress that these counselors are highly qualified, and deliberated at length with professional seriousness; it's just that I don't happen to agree with their conclusion. But, had I been in their spot (in the system), I'm not completely sure how I would have voted. I do believe that this same type

of shortsightedness keepsus working harder and harder to solve today's and yesterday's problems, but holds back the development of the systems of the next decade. Had the counselors rejected the extra resources because they did not fit into their plan for their guidance office, the situation would be perfectly acceptable. Their decision was made, however, on the basis that they could not afford to take on any more pressures in their exceedingly busy workdays.

How many guidance departments and counselors can answer the questions: Where do you expect your department to be in three years? What are your long-range objectives? How do you plan to help counselors in this department to develop themselves more fully? The same systems type of reasoning which has been used so well to develop some automated information systems should be applied to the larger concept of guidance education.

It takes a system to help decide what questions to ask systematically, and, until the strands of the guidance operations are woven together in the minds of practicing counselors, computer operations such as college and occupations selection, can never be more than attachments to already existing resources found in

guidance offices. The fabric of maximum strength is never woven, never materializes.

How can direct action be taken by counselors now to enhance their profession through their use of "systematic" thinking. The "in" terms of the systems and management worlds include accountability, independent outside auditing, cost effectiveness, PPBS budgeting (outcome budgeting), PERT applications in education, R and D indefinite amateurization, contingency management, milestone techniques, flow diagrams, etc. These words represent techniques which, to some degree, have in common the systematic and orderly progression from where we are now to someplace (specified) in the future.

But to make these concepts more than just words, each counselor must allocate some time for planning, even when, especially when, four hundred counselees are pounding down the doors because they need new shoes tonight! We all know that work expands to overflow the position, but counselees do make it without psychological band-aids when the counselor is sick, at conventions, having long coffee breaks or participating in other less enjoyable meetings. Priorities need to be established.

Since most educators are poorly prepared (by

virtue of our experience and preparation) to engage in systematic management, other resources are needed. In one large Urban area, an interim city government successfully utilized experts from the business and industrial community by organizing them into task forces to deal with specific problems. Such a procedure could be exceptionally helpful to guidance departments. Counselors would need to be brave enough to ask, and fearless enough to accept the implications of the planning work in which they participated. Only occasionally have the fairly sophisticated management techniques now available been applied to the educational environment. Leaders from local businesses and industries, in general, are willing to volunteer to help school systems (guidance systems) to define problems, establish priorities, set long and short range goals, and to establish the mechanism for continually monitoring progress towards those goals.

The counselors' role will be enhanced when he asks for help, not just money, in establishing his guidance department's "system." And when he does establish this dynamic framework of priority placed objectives, he will

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be in an excellent position to use or not use the
information sub-systems and equipment developed by others.